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Chad Vella

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LET THE TALKING BEGIN

JEWES AND BLACKS: LET THE HEALING BEGIN. By MICHAEL LERNER & CORNEL WEST. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995. Pp. 276.

CHAD VELLA*

INTRODUCTION

In *Jews and Blacks: Let the Healing Begin*, Michael Lerner and Cornel West conduct a dialogue about the relationship between Jews and Blacks, historically two of the most politically progressive groups in America. The two intellectuals discuss and debate the origins of the present rift, distrust, and resentment between these two groups. Both Cornel West and Michael Lerner share the belief that these two groups were allies during the Civil Rights movement and lament the current lack of understanding between Jews and Blacks. The book offers a hopeful message of compassion and understanding that can serve to reunite these potential allies.

This book review will open with a description of the personal histories of the two authors. Next, the authors' general viewpoints are developed and analyzed. West's economic analysis of Jewish-Black relations and his call for redistribution of wealth is compared to Jack Kemp's ideas on enterprise zones, and Lerner's call for a new Politics of Meaning is connected to West's views on race relations.

I. PERSONAL HISTORY

The book opens with West and Lerner sharing personal insights into their lives. West, a respected intellectual who grew up in a stable working class family, candidly admits that he was kicked out of the Black school in the third grade for beating up the teacher.¹ Shortly thereafter, West entered an enrichment program at a new school, became a Christian, and reformed his behavior.² He was no longer the

* Articles Editor, BOSTON COLLEGE THIRD WORLD LAW JOURNAL.

¹ See MICHAEL LERNER & CORNEL WEST, *JEWES AND BLACKS: LET THE HEALING BEGIN* 16, 17 (1995).

² See *id.* at 17.

bully who stole the other children's lunch money before school, but someone who spoke with and for a larger group.³

Michael Lerner grew up in a self-described Zionist family in New Jersey.⁴ His parents were politically active and helped "WASP" candidates get elected to office.⁵ Lerner attended a Christian school as a child and was once punched in the face by another classmate when he painted a Menorah on the school window as other children painted symbols of Christmas.⁶ He did not know any Black families until more Blacks began moving into the Newark area.⁷ Lerner feared encountering Blacks in school, some of whom would punch him for a nickel.⁸ These candid personal revelations set the stage for an open, honest discussion of the issues facing Jews and Blacks as West and Lerner conduct their dialogue person to person, and man to man, not just as members of different racial groups.

II. HISTORY OF JEWISH-BLACK RELATIONS

West and Lerner discuss the present rift between Jews and Blacks. According to both authors, the "hey-day" of Black-Jewish relations was the 1960's Civil Rights movement.⁹ This alliance, however, has unraveled to the present state of disaffection. West chides Lerner for the tendency of some Jewish organizations to overemphasize Black anti-Semitism in America.¹⁰ Groups such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) focus on Black anti-Semitism even though very few of the 1800 physical attacks on Jews last year were committed by Blacks.¹¹ Lerner agrees with this critique, but calls on West to acknowledge that anti-Semitism does exist in the Black community.¹² West tries to address this anti-Semitic element by cataloging the Black churches' latent retention of the Christian tradition that sees Jews as Christ-killers.¹³

In terms of economics, problems develop as Blacks meet Jewish businessmen, and culturally, some Blacks resent the Jewish achieve-

³ See *id.* at 18.

⁴ See *id.* at 26.

⁵ See *id.*

⁶ See *id.* at 29.

⁷ See *id.* at 32.

⁸ See *id.*

⁹ See *id.* at 80-82.

¹⁰ See *id.* at 135.

¹¹ See *id.*

¹² See *id.* at 136.

¹³ See *id.*

ments in America.¹⁴ According to West, Blacks envy Jewish success.¹⁵ It is West's belief that Blacks compare themselves to Jews because of a Freudian connection between the groups, with Blacks representing the irrational pleasure seeking id, and Jews the critical intelligence or ego.¹⁶

Lerner continues the discussion by explaining that Jews, in the fifties and sixties, rejected their community of meaning presented in a depoliticized, assimilated Judaism.¹⁷ This pattern of discussion is replicated throughout the book. West relies on an economic interpretation of Black-Jewish relations, while Lerner seeks to supplement West's thinking. In Lerner's vision, all Americans are lost without personal meaning that can be found through understanding suffering, and in progressive politics. Thus, West's economic prescriptions for American society must be analyzed, as well as Lerner's call to find meaning by rejecting selfishness and participating in progressive politics.

III. WEST'S ECONOMIC VISION

West has written and expressed his affinity with Marxism in his book, *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought*.¹⁸ His economic analysis reveals that Black-Jewish tension arises out of economic envy.¹⁹ West makes several sweeping statements to support his analysis of Black-Jewish relations. Blacks and Jews must unite to fight against vast economic inequality.²⁰ For West, it would take a shift in thinking for progressives to call for a Jewish voice when looking for oppressed people in this country,²¹ and because the Jewish community is not associated with low income or difficulty with access to resources, often Jews are not considered oppressed.²² Furthermore, West states that any reference to racism inevitably seems to carry with it a reference to economics.²³ Blacks need more access to capital and credit.²⁴ In the public sphere there must be more investment in working class and very poor com-

¹⁴ See *id.*

¹⁵ See *id.* at 138.

¹⁶ See *id.* at 137-38.

¹⁷ See *id.*

¹⁸ See generally CORNEL WEST, *THE ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF MARXIST THOUGHT* (1987).

¹⁹ See LERNER & WEST, *supra* note 1, at 79, 136, 251.

²⁰ See *id.* at 179.

²¹ See *id.* at 230-31.

²² See *id.*

²³ See *id.* at 251.

²⁴ See *id.*

munities.²⁵ Blacks must gain access to jobs with adequate pay.²⁶ This is just part of West's overall redistributive strategy.

West advocates, wholeheartedly, the redistribution of resources.²⁷ The political goal is the redistributionist model. Blacks and other progressives must be mobilized to fight for redistribution of wealth.²⁸ Furthermore, the problem in the Black communities is disinvestment.²⁹ "There has been a shift from permanent jobs to temporary ones, from job to no job, and a shift from social services at level 10 to level 4,³⁰ and a shift from a bad to a totally decrepit educational system."³¹ This is all a result of a withdrawal of resources from black communities.³²

In West's opinion, conservatives have gained power and have been able to begin this disinvestment by a subtle manipulation that convinces people that it is in their interests to side with a more powerful elite, rather than with their fellow working-class people, and working middle class people.³³ According to West, conservatives have shaped society in the image of an unfair model, presumably, the capitalist model of economics.³⁴

To address these problems, West advocates increased regulation of banks in order to outlaw redlining, and checks on government procurement so that Blacks can have access to billions of dollars in government contracts.³⁵ Without this change in economic fairness, and without increased progressive political involvement, America is headed towards Armageddon.³⁶ In sum, West advocates non-market values and states that on this issue he and Lerner reach agreement.

IV. WEST'S VISION ANALYZED

West's basic proposition is that the welfare state does not spend enough. Redistribution can and must be increased; otherwise get ready

²⁵ See *id.*

²⁶ See *id.*

²⁷ See *id.*

²⁸ See *id.* at 252.

²⁹ See *id.*

³⁰ West's use of the terms level 10 and level 4 seem to refer to a scale of 1 to 10, where level 10 would stand for fully-funded social services, and level 1 would be the bare minimum of social services. See *id.*

³¹ See *id.*

³² See *id.*

³³ See *id.* at 252-53.

³⁴ See *id.* at 253.

³⁵ See *id.* at 255.

³⁶ See *id.*

for Armageddon in the form of gun fights and the arrest of Black dissenting voices like his own.³⁷ Marx could not have said it better. The debate on the issue of economic redistribution, however, has been one of the principal battle grounds of recent economic debate in this country. Should we be a nation that promotes laissez-faire capitalism or socialistic capitalism? Attempts at socialism have failed, witness the former Soviet Union.³⁸ Yet America still has an economic choice to make. Should America follow a redistributionist model of economics or a more laissez-faire model?

West calls for increased investment, a euphemism for increased government spending. Democratic representative Charles Rangel agrees with West and compares such an increase in investment to the United States' economic investment in rebuilding our allies following World War II.³⁹ Representative Rangel further commented in December of 1992 that the United States will spend billions in the former Soviet Union.⁴⁰ He strongly urged the federal government to carry out such an investment in our nation's cities.⁴¹ This type of spending has come under attack by the new Republican majority in Congress.⁴² They argue that since the 1960's and Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, billions of dollars have been sent into our cities but there is no overall economic boom to these areas.⁴³ At times West has gone beyond mere redistribution and has advocated a complete turn from the capitalist economy.⁴⁴ In 1985 he wrote to the Black community explaining that the relative unity and strength of our capitalist foes requires that we must come together if our struggle is to win.⁴⁵ Apparently, in 1995 Jews are welcome additions to this struggle.

V. JACK KEMP'S VISION

In contrast to West's vision of increased spending and a more redistributive economy, others call for letting capitalism run free in the

³⁷ See *id.*

³⁸ See generally ROBERT VINCENT, *SOVIET COMMUNISM FROM REFORM TO COLLAPSE* (1995).

³⁹ Charles Rangel, *Economics of Drugs, Crime, Poverty*, ROLL CALL, Dec. 10, 1992.

⁴⁰ See *id.*

⁴¹ See *id.*

⁴² See Charles Krauthammer, *Dole Tax Plan Excellent Cut Would Force Debate on Size of Welfare State*, DAYTON DAILY NEWS, Sept. 3, 1996, at A14.

⁴³ See Jeff Dickerson, *Project Hope GOP Plan Shows Conservatives, Too, Want to Help*, ATLANTA J. & CONST., Nov. 8, 1995, at A12.

⁴⁴ See Leon Wieseltier, *All and Nothing at All: The Unreal World of Cornel West*, NEW REPUBLIC, Mar. 6, 1995, at 35.

⁴⁵ See *id.*

inner cities.⁴⁶ The strongest and most vociferous proponent of this theory is Jack Kemp, former Secretary of the Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the 1996 Republican Vice Presidential nominee. In fact, as recently as October 8, 1995, Kemp could be seen advocating capitalist market forces as a response to the problems of poor Blacks and others in the inner cities on *Meet The Press*.⁴⁷ According to Kemp, the vehicle which will put market forces into the inner cities is enterprise zones. Kemp has long espoused his ideas for enterprise zones which work by providing incentives to businesses to relocate in economically depressed areas. On *Larry King Live* and on the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, he has explained his proposals on enterprise zones, privatizing public housing, altering the welfare system, and entrepreneurial capitalism.⁴⁸ In stark contrast to West's views, Kemp stated in 1992 that we cannot afford to resort to the bureaucratic government redistributionist solutions that followed Watts in the 1960's.⁴⁹ Instead, government must break down the barriers to ownership, job creation and entrepreneurship.⁵⁰

Kemp believes that we have two economies operating in America, one that is very successful and one a failure.⁵¹ The inner city redistributionist welfare state economy has produced Black economic depression, while America as a whole has the most successful economy in the world due to a more market-driven, capitalist economy.⁵² Kemp points out the importance of private ownership noting that in public housing in Los Angeles where residents are managing their own communities and homesteading toward ownership, there was no property damage.⁵³ On May 4, 1992 Kemp appeared on the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*⁵⁴ where he decried the \$2.6 trillion spent on the war on poverty, some of which was nobly intended and did not work.⁵⁵

⁴⁶ See Jack Kemp appearing on *Meet The Press* (NBC television broadcast, Oct. 12, 1995).

⁴⁷ See *id.*

⁴⁸ See generally *Larry King Live*, (CNN television broadcast, Jan. 26, 1993), available in LEXIS, Nexis Library, curnews File; *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, (PBS television broadcast, May 4, 1992), available in LEXIS, Nexis Library, curnews File.

⁴⁹ See Wesley Pruden, *The White Hero for Los Angeles*, WASH. TIMES, May 6, 1992, at A4.

⁵⁰ See *id.*

⁵¹ See *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, *supra* note 48.

⁵² See *id.*

⁵³ See Pruden, *supra* note 49, at A4.

⁵⁴ See *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, *supra* note 48.

⁵⁵ See *id.*

VI. ENTERPRISE ZONES

Kemp's legislative answer to the problem is enterprise zones.⁵⁶ *Governing Magazine* identifies the originator of enterprise zones as the British-born economist Stuart Butler.⁵⁷ The idea was to award tax incentives and to clear away government red-tape in inner city areas in the hope of revitalizing the private sector.⁵⁸ In the past ten years, thirty-seven states have designated more than 3,000 enterprise zones all over the country.⁵⁹ Tax incentives include state income tax credits, property tax abatements, a cut in retail sales taxes, or a discount in water and utility charges.⁶⁰

VII. WEST AND KEMP

Kemp's push for enterprise zones and market forces to help the inner cities presents a striking similarity to West's proposals for alleviating the racial problems of the inner cities. Both men believe that economics caused and eventually can cure race problems. Kemp admitted on *MacNeil/Lehrer* that his way of thinking is close to economic determinism.⁶¹ Although West wants to take out selfish-driven market forces from Black communities, he advocates a redistributionist, socialist economic system that will help Blacks and alleviate racial tensions. Thus, both men advocate economic solutions to racial problems. For each of them, the best economic system creates the least economic tensions and rivalries.

VIII. CAPITALISM OR SOCIALISM

The basic debate between West's and Kemp's visions of the most efficacious way to solve racial tensions is part of a larger debate between socialism and capitalism. While Kemp's views tend towards unfettered capitalism, West's economic solutions would move the country towards socialism. A.C. Pigou, former professor of political economy at the University of Cambridge, explained this debate in his book, *Socialism Versus Capitalism*.⁶² Pigou marshals arguments in favor and in opposi-

⁵⁶ See *id.*

⁵⁷ See *The Strange Career of Enterprise Zones*, *GOVERNING MAG.*, Mar. 1994, at 32.

⁵⁸ See *id.*

⁵⁹ See *id.*

⁶⁰ See *id.*

⁶¹ See *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, *supra* note 48.

⁶² See generally A.C. PIGOU, *SOCIALISM VERSUS CAPITALISM* (1951).

tion to the the basic forms of socialism and capitalism. Pigou notes that the widely unequal distribution of income in a capitalistic system is an evil because resources are wasted, as they are used to satisfy less urgent needs while more urgent needs are neglected.⁶³ The rich buy expensive cars while the truly poor need food. The young and poor are hurt as poverty deprives poor children of proper nutrition and educational opportunities, weakening their earning power, and thus, the cycle perpetuates itself.⁶⁴ On the other hand, a redistributionist system with heavy taxes on large incomes may check the accumulation of capital for home use so that ultimately, the poor would lose.⁶⁵

These two systems are dissimilar with respect to invention, efficiency, and the temptations of competition. Socialism does not spark new inventions as well as capitalism does. Pigou writes that "government creates scarcely anything."⁶⁶ If the government, rather than private enterprise, had controlled the economy a hundred years ago, there would be good reason to believe that methods of production today would be about as effective as they were fifty years ago.⁶⁷ In terms of efficiency, "capitalism provides a machinery by which the optimum size of productive unit tends to establish itself."⁶⁸ The temptations of competition which include the temptation to produce unsafe or poorly designed goods, however, may highlight socialism as the more beneficial economic system.

For Pigou, however true it may be that companies using shady business practices will not last in the long run, the fact remains that in capitalist industries it often pays to sell bad goods.⁶⁹ Under socialism, a municipal authority will be under no temptation to slaughter animals for food under unsanitary conditions, for example, to escape the expense of making them sanitary.⁷⁰ Yet, in a capitalist system, inefficient businesses fail, and inefficiency is weeded out of the system.⁷¹

Pigou argues that the central planning associated with socialism is bound to make numerous mistakes.⁷² Under capitalism the market does make better decisions.⁷³

⁶³ See *id.* at 21.

⁶⁴ See *id.*

⁶⁵ See *id.* at 29.

⁶⁶ *Id.* at 80.

⁶⁷ See *id.*

⁶⁸ *Id.* at 88.

⁶⁹ See *id.* at 90.

⁷⁰ See *id.*

⁷¹ See *id.* at 91.

⁷² See *id.* at 117.

⁷³ See *id.*

At the close of the work, Pigou tries to offer his vision of the ideal economic system based on this point-counterpoint debate. He favors a graduated income tax, and he would nationalize certain industries gradually.⁷⁴

This debate is joined by West and Kemp. West focuses on capitalism's inequalities,⁷⁵ and Kemp focuses on socialism's inefficiencies.⁷⁶ The reader wonders if either answer will truly solve racial tensions between Jews and Blacks. If everyone has more money will everyone be happy? Will tensions die? Such a narrow economic view of potential solutions to racial tensions seems open to critique.

In the *National Review*, author and fellow conservative David Frum critiques Kemp's myopic focus on economics to solve any problem, racial or otherwise.⁷⁷ His critique, however, could apply equally well to West's focus on redistribution to end Black poverty and thereby end tension between Blacks and Jews.⁷⁸ Frum writes that Kemp claims to believe that the right incentives will entice almost all the poor out of poverty.⁷⁹ The enterprise zone legislation was Kemp's answer to providing the incentives for business to relocate to depressed inner cities and for residents to gain access to jobs and capital.⁸⁰ The subtext of the discussion provided by West and the timing of the enterprise zone legislation—after the LA riots—implies that these economic incentives will do more than help to create jobs: they will create jobs which will, in turn, end racial tension.⁸¹

Frum believes that Kemp's ideas are too optimistic because he sees America's social problems as relatively manageable and because his preferred means of managing them assumes the basic moral similarity of all Americans.⁸² At the 1992 Republican National Convention in Houston, Kemp stated that it is not the values of the poor that are bankrupt, but the values of the welfare system that are bankrupt.⁸³ Enterprise zones presupposed a vision of the poor as potentially hard-working, and even as entrepreneurial people.⁸⁴ For Kemp, all America had to do to move people out of dependency and into work was reverse

⁷⁴ See *id.* at 137–39.

⁷⁵ See LERNER & WEST, *supra* note 1, at 252.

⁷⁶ See MacNeil/Lehrer *NewsHour*, *supra* note 48.

⁷⁷ See David Frum, *Happy Warrior*, NAT'L REV., Aug. 1, 1994, at 39.

⁷⁸ See *id.*

⁷⁹ See *id.*

⁸⁰ See *id.*

⁸¹ See generally *id.*; H.R. 4210, 101st Cong., 1st Sess. § 1391 (1992).

⁸² See Frum, *supra* note 77, at 39.

⁸³ See *id.*

⁸⁴ See *id.*

the pattern of incentives and disincentives.⁸⁵ According to Frum, the idea was somewhat of a failure, as businesses in areas immediately adjoining the zones simply moved across the border and into the zones, but few new businesses were actually created in the zone areas.⁸⁶

Kemp defends enterprise zones as an idea that has not achieved great results because it has not been adequately tested.⁸⁷ This claim sounds a lot like West's claim that the billions spent on the Great Society programs was not enough money.⁸⁸ Frum's strongest rebuke of this economic determinism is contained in a quote from columnist George Will.⁸⁹ Will asked Kemp if there really was some rate of economic growth—four, or five, or six percent—that would cause women to stop having babies out of wedlock.⁹⁰ Kemp believed that there was but Will responded, "I simply don't."⁹¹

The economic growth that Kemp champions, or the redistribution that West calls for, may help Blacks gain economic power and thus make them more similar to affluent Jews, but money can not make race problems disappear. Frum chides Kemp for believing that there is an economic solution to every American social problem.⁹²

In sum, Kemp's faith in the power of wealth seems "exaggerated if not embarrassingly materialistic."⁹³ Thus, West's view of the redistributionist model of economics and Kemp's view of the capitalist model are seemingly both subject to the same critique: each view is materialistic and focuses on lack of wealth or disparity in wealth as the cause of social and racial problems. In contrast Michael Lerner calls for a rejection of these materialistic and dependant ways of thinking about people and about Black-Jewish race relations.

IX. LERNER'S VISION

On several occasions throughout *Jews and Blacks: Let the Healing Begin*, Lerner seeks to draw West away from predominantly economic thinking. Instead, Lerner focuses on his Jewish heritage which forces him to identify with the most oppressed groups, including Blacks.⁹⁴

⁸⁵ See *id.* at 42.

⁸⁶ See *id.* at 43.

⁸⁷ See *id.*

⁸⁸ See LERNER & WEST, *supra* note 1, at 251.

⁸⁹ See Frum, *supra* note 77, at 43.

⁹⁰ See *id.*

⁹¹ *Id.*

⁹² See *id.*

⁹³ *Id.* at 63.

⁹⁴ See LERNER & WEST, *supra* note 1, at 148.

Lerner wants Jews and Blacks to understand each other's oppression and then unite to fight common enemies.⁹⁵ Lerner states that he is transcending a narrow, economic definition of what oppression is, a definition on which West relies.⁹⁶ Lerner wants to focus not on economics, but on the alienation and the decline in solidarity and trust that undermines long-term relationships, families, and friendships.⁹⁷

This decline is based on the frustration of the psychological, emotional, and spiritual component of our being.⁹⁸ Lerner calls these components our "meaning needs."⁹⁹ In Lerner's opinion, a deprivation of meaning in our lives is real oppression, as real as pain generated by poverty.¹⁰⁰ The violent, self-destructive behavior in the Black community, like that in white American suburbs, is a reflection of the crisis of meaning that pervades our entire society.¹⁰¹ According to Lerner, many American Jews assimilated their religious beliefs to follow the American materialistic hunger and desire to be accepted.¹⁰² In this process of assimilation, they lost the values of caring and unselfishness found in the Torah, and replaced them with selfishness.¹⁰³

Lerner explains the role of the marketplace in the loss of meaning.¹⁰⁴ The competitive marketplace produces alienation pulling people away from political struggle. People must not compete, but join together for change.¹⁰⁵ Also, the narcissistic personality styles encouraged by the marketplace, also referred to as the look out for "number one" mentality, weaken the ability of Americans to sustain loving relationships.¹⁰⁶

The inability to create loving relationships creates pain in our lives, a pain that Lerner wants people to see as connected to the pain of the most oppressed.¹⁰⁷ For example, Lerner wants Jews to see their pain caused by the market as related to the pain of Blacks who are economically oppressed by the same market.¹⁰⁸ In turn, Blacks should let their pain allow them to identify with the psychic oppression of

⁹⁵ See *id.*

⁹⁶ See *id.* at 231.

⁹⁷ See *id.*

⁹⁸ See *id.*

⁹⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰⁰ See *id.*

¹⁰¹ See *id.*

¹⁰² See *id.* at 68, 232, 233.

¹⁰³ See *id.* at 238.

¹⁰⁴ See *id.*

¹⁰⁵ See *id.*

¹⁰⁶ See *id.* at 238-39.

¹⁰⁷ See *id.* at 239.

¹⁰⁸ See *id.* at 238-41.

Jews.¹⁰⁹ This will create common ground between Jews and Blacks, rather than a contest between these groups to decide whose pain has been and is worse. Lerner argues forcefully that it is not relevant to respond that it is not the job of Blacks to fight white racism, or it is not the job of Jews to heal the pain of anti-Semites.¹¹⁰ Instead, Lerner offers a "Politics of Meaning" that challenges the ethos of selfishness, a politics that is as much concerned about alleviating the pain of whites as of Blacks.¹¹¹

West tries to probe the "Politics of Meaning" and asks how it is different from a politics of compassion.¹¹² Lerner responds by pointing out that the difference is in the emphasis on what you care about.¹¹³ He believes that we must care about economic security, but also psychological and spiritual needs.¹¹⁴ The shift is away from purely material terms to moral concerns as well.¹¹⁵ In this sense, Lerner's ideas respond nicely to David Frum's critique of Kemp's (and West's) materialistic solutions to healing the oppressed. West listens but again asserts that you cannot seriously talk about fighting racism without discussing economics.¹¹⁶

Lerner's rejection of selfishness is laudatory. He recognizes the futility of trying to address the oppression of Jews and Blacks as a purely economic problem.¹¹⁷ He identifies the materialistic selfishness of the marketplace and instead of replacing capitalism with socialism, he wants to move on to an understanding of psychic needs.¹¹⁸ This represents the best that *Jews and Blacks: Let the Healing Begin* has to offer.

Lerner's understanding of compassion encompasses more than a concern for addressing material needs. With this understanding, he succeeds in basing his "Politics of Meaning" on the values found in the Torah.¹¹⁹ Lerner tries to see the other as someone created in the image of God in order to understand all oppression.¹²⁰ This type of compassion surely can bring Jews, Blacks and all people together.

¹⁰⁹ See *id.*

¹¹⁰ See *id.* at 240.

¹¹¹ See *id.* at 240-42.

¹¹² See *id.* at 241.

¹¹³ See *id.*

¹¹⁴ See *id.*

¹¹⁵ See *id.*

¹¹⁶ See *id.* at 251.

¹¹⁷ See *id.*

¹¹⁸ See *id.*

¹¹⁹ See *id.* at 238.

¹²⁰ See *id.* at 241.

The only critique of this view is that Lerner's religion culminates in his politics. Lerner speaks as if the values in the Torah lead him to progressive politics rather than to Temple.¹²¹ The question asked after the 1992 Republican convention applies to Lerner as much as Pat Robertson or the Christian Coalition. Is God really a Republican or for that matter a progressive? The "Politics of Meaning" seems to draw on a religious influence to instruct politics in ways to give people lives of meaning.¹²² Why not just go straight to the source and get meaning in one's life from one's religious beliefs? Perhaps Lerner only wants his religion to inform his political choices but by calling his views a "Politics of Meaning" he opens himself up to a critique by those who do not think that the culmination of the Jewish religion is progressive politics.

Ironically, West was faulted for a similar vice in an article by Leon Wieseltier in *The New Republic*.¹²³ Writing about West, Wieseltier explains that what summons West to faith in God is not the object of the faith, but its social utility.¹²⁴ "He resembles in this regard many of the conservatives whom he despises."¹²⁵

In the chapter entitled *Strategies for Reconciliation and Healing*, the authors fail to adequately build upon their worthy progression from a purely economic dialogue to one that includes economic and psychic oppression.¹²⁶ In the last chapter, West and Lerner offer platitudes rather than effective strategies.¹²⁷ West tries to adopt the "Politics of Meaning" but wonders if it would ever be strong enough to deal with entrenched xenophobia.¹²⁸ The moral appeal must be linked to systemic change for West.¹²⁹ He wants a focus on the children.¹³⁰ West wants to fuse the "Politics of Meaning" with compassion.¹³¹ He states that most people still have compassion for America's children.¹³² He wants to call an emergency meeting of major progressive leaders and progressive intellectuals from both communities.¹³³ Furthermore, he

¹²¹ See *id.* at 269.

¹²² See *id.*

¹²³ See Wieseltier, *supra* note 44, at 34.

¹²⁴ See *id.*

¹²⁵ *Id.*

¹²⁶ See *id.*

¹²⁷ See *id.* at 269–71.

¹²⁸ See LERNER & WEST, *supra* note 1, at 257.

¹²⁹ See *id.*

¹³⁰ See *id.*

¹³¹ See *id.* at 257.

¹³² See *id.*

¹³³ See *id.* at 266.

wants to engage the grassroots organizations in dialogue.¹³⁴ It is not exactly clear, however, what will be spoken or accomplished by this dialogue. Apparently, he believes that the dialogue will help address the most important needs of each neighborhood.¹³⁵

Lerner proposes a conference aimed at launching a campaign of healing and repair in both communities.¹³⁶ The conference would try to undermine racism and anti-Semitism.¹³⁷ He advocates launching an ongoing organization which would oppose these points of tension.¹³⁸ "A balance must be struck between a large scale public assault and smaller efforts tailored to individual communities."¹³⁹ Every major cultural hero, musician, sports hero, intellectual, artist, television or movie star, talk show host, or preacher will be mobilized.¹⁴⁰ Jewish financial resources will be unleashed in Black communities.¹⁴¹

These efforts must be done as a self-affirmation of our own most fundamental needs.¹⁴² For Lerner, this can not be done as charity, however, because that would be self-denigrating.¹⁴³ In this way, West and Lerner fail to offer any helpful prescriptions. People should talk and create organizations.¹⁴⁴ What they will do, however, is anyone's best guess. The authors propose a yearly national Summit on Ethics and Meaning aimed at assessing the Ethical State of the Union.¹⁴⁵ Blacks and Jews will thus unite in a critique of the larger society.¹⁴⁶

Happily, the authors do recover and end the book on a high note. They identify the need for a progressive alliance now that the balance of political power has shifted to Republicans in Congress.¹⁴⁷ The authors' last exchange calls for a traditional value.¹⁴⁸ Love your neighbor as yourself.¹⁴⁹ If the struggle is against anti-Semitism in the Black community and against racism in the Jewish community, then a real

¹³⁴ See *id.* at 267.

¹³⁵ See *id.*

¹³⁶ See *id.* at 269.

¹³⁷ *Id.* at 269.

¹³⁸ See *id.*

¹³⁹ *Id.*

¹⁴⁰ See *id.* at 270.

¹⁴¹ See *id.*

¹⁴² See *id.*

¹⁴³ See *id.*

¹⁴⁴ See *id.* at 267, 269.

¹⁴⁵ See *id.* at 271.

¹⁴⁶ See *id.*

¹⁴⁷ See *Waiting for Clinton's Contract*, BOSTON GLOBE, Sept. 4, 1996, at A14.

¹⁴⁸ See LERNER & WEST, *supra* note 1, at 272.

¹⁴⁹ See *id.*

alliance is possible.¹⁵⁰ This would represent an important direction for healing activity.¹⁵¹

X. CONCLUSION: A TRADITIONAL VALUE

Blacks and Jews: Let the Healing Begin could be a helpful book. As Louis Farakhan gains prominence, Jews will continue to lack trust in Blacks. As Black poverty persists, Blacks will remain isolated from Jews, and healing between these communities becomes even more important.

A major lesson of the book is provided not in the dialogue itself but in what the dialogue represents. The dialogue is a caring friendship between a Jew and a Black despite intellectual differences. If Cornel West and Michael Lerner can unite in unselfish friendship, maybe Blacks and Jews have reason for hope.

¹⁵⁰ See *id.*

¹⁵¹ See *id.*

